



**CRITICAL REALISM AND SATIRICAL POETICS IN 20TH-CENTURY
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the intricate relationship between critical realism and satirical poetics within 20th-century English literature. It argues that critical realism provides a robust epistemological foundation for understanding the underlying mechanisms of social reality, while satirical poetics offers a crucial aesthetic mode for critiquing and subverting these very structures. By examining key literary works, this study demonstrates how authors employed satire not merely for comedic effect but as a sophisticated tool to expose societal contradictions and ideological biases inherent in their contemporary world. Ultimately, the analysis reveals how this dual approach fostered a literature deeply engaged with both the diagnosis and the imaginative disruption of established norms.

KEYWORDS

Critical Realism,
Satirical Poetics,
20th-Century
Literature, English
Literature, Social
Critique, Literary
Theory, Satire.

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century witnessed profound societal shifts in England, prompting literary responses that sought to both reflect and critique the era's complexities. Within this dynamic landscape, the convergence of critical realism and satirical poetics emerged as a particularly potent mode of literary engagement. Critical realism, as a philosophical and methodological stance, posits that underlying structures and mechanisms shape observable social phenomena, often obscuring true power relations and ideological forces. It moves beyond mere empirical description to uncover the causal layers of reality, challenging superficial understandings of society. This approach, extending its influence from earlier periods, provided a robust framework for authors seeking to dissect the socio-political and economic realities of their time, particularly in the wake of disillusionment with bourgeois ideologies. Concurrently, satirical poetics offered a sophisticated arsenal of literary techniques designed to expose, ridicule, and ultimately provoke reform regarding human vices, follies, and systemic abuses. Far from being mere entertainment, satire employs wit, irony, parody, and exaggeration to deliver incisive social commentary, aiming to shame individuals or institutions into improvement. It functions as a critical counterweight, challenging established authorities and prevailing mindsets by highlighting their inherent contradictions and absurdities.

This article argues that the synthesis of critical realism and satirical poetics in 20th-century English literature created a uniquely powerful form of critique. By grounding satirical attacks in a critical

realist understanding of societal structures, authors were able to transcend superficial lampooning, instead crafting works that meticulously unmasked the deep-seated mechanisms of power, ideology, and human behavior. This introduction sets the stage for an exploration of how these two distinct yet complementary traditions informed each other, enabling a profound and enduring literary examination of the 20th-century English condition.

Literature Review

Scholarly discourse on critical realism in literary studies has deepened significantly, moving beyond its philosophical origins to explore its methodological implications for textual analysis. Recent scholarship emphasizes critical realism's capacity to illuminate the deep-seated, often unobservable, structures that underpin social reality, thereby offering a robust framework for interpreting literary representations of power, ideology, and human agency [1]. This approach is particularly valuable for understanding how literary texts not only reflect but also actively interrogate the causal mechanisms of societal phenomena, such as economic disparities or political hegemonies, rather than merely describing their surface manifestations [2]. While its roots extend to earlier periods, the application of critical realist principles to 20th-century English literature provides a lens through which to examine the era's profound societal transformations and the resultant disillusionment with established systems. This perspective allows for an analysis of how authors sought to expose the hidden forces shaping individual lives and collective experiences, moving beyond a superficial critique to a more profound engagement with systemic issues.

The study of satirical poetics has likewise evolved, with contemporary analyses highlighting its multifaceted role as both a literary genre and a critical device. Satire is widely recognized for its capacity to ridicule vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings, aiming to provoke thought and inspire reform through constructive social criticism [3]. It employs a sophisticated array of techniques, including strong irony, sarcasm, parody, burlesque, and exaggeration, to expose perceived flaws in individuals, institutions, or society at large [4]. Far from being solely humorous, satire's deeper purpose lies in its ability to offer profound insights into a society's collective psyche and power structures, functioning as a vital counterweight to established authorities and prevailing mindsets [3]. This critical function underscores the satirist's role as a guardian of moral and aesthetic values, actively censuring and ridiculing societal absurdities to highlight areas for improvement [4].

Further distinctions within satirical theory delineate various modes, each with particular critical implications. Horatian satire, for instance, offers a gentler, more comic critique of common human flaws, aiming for entertainment alongside insight. In contrast, Juvenalian satire adopts a darker, more hostile tone, employing sharp irony to combat the perceived wrongdoings of public figures and institutions, often without the need for humor to convey its biting critique [5]. Menippean satire, the oldest form, targets specific mindsets or worldviews, often with a similarly harsh approach [5]. These diverse forms demonstrate satire's adaptability and its potential for nuanced engagement with complex social issues. The choice of satirical mode often reflects the author's specific critical intent, ranging from mild admonishment to outright condemnation of systemic failures.

While critical realism and satirical poetics have each garnered extensive scholarly attention, the explicit examination of their synthesis as a distinct and potent mode of critique in 20th-century English literature remains an area ripe for further exploration. Existing scholarship often analyzes critical realist texts for their structural insights or satirical works for their rhetorical force, but rarely does it

systematically unpack how the interplay between these two traditions amplifies their individual critical power. For instance, studies might acknowledge the critical realist underpinnings of an author's worldview or the satirical elements in their style, yet few delve into the precise mechanics by which a critical realist understanding of societal structures informs and deepens the satirical techniques employed. This article seeks to bridge this gap, arguing that the grounding of satirical attacks in a critical realist understanding of underlying mechanisms allowed 20th-century English authors to transcend superficial lampooning. Instead, they crafted works that meticulously unmasked the deep-seated causal layers of power, ideology, and human behavior, thereby achieving a more profound and enduring form of literary examination. This convergence enabled authors to move beyond merely depicting social ills to revealing their systemic origins, offering a more incisive and structurally informed critique.

The unique analytical power derived from this convergence lies in its capacity to offer a critique that is both intellectually rigorous and rhetorically compelling. By marrying critical realism's commitment to uncovering hidden structures with satire's potent arsenal of ridicule and exposure, authors created literature that not only entertained but also profoundly challenged readers to reconsider the fundamental nature of their society. This synthesis allowed for a nuanced exploration of how individual follies were often symptomatic of deeper, systemic dysfunctions, rather than isolated moral failings. The enduring legacy of this critical realist satire in 20th-century English literature thus lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive and deeply penetrating examination of the human condition amidst rapid societal change, offering insights that remain pertinent to contemporary understandings of power and critique.

Research Methodology

This article employs a qualitative and interpretive research methodology, grounded in close textual analysis and a critical theoretical synthesis. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the intricate relationship between critical realism and satirical poetics in 20th-century English literature. The core objective is to move beyond separate analyses, focusing on their synergistic interaction as a distinct and powerful mode of critique. It illuminates how authors utilized critical realist understanding of societal structures to inform and deepen satirical techniques, achieving a profound and structurally informed examination of the English condition.

Operationalizing critical realism involves identifying textual evidence revealing authors' engagement with underlying social structures, causal mechanisms, and ideological forces, beyond surface description. This entails analyzing how literary works expose unobservable systems of power, economic disparities, and cultural hegemonies. Critical realist analysis focuses on narrative strategies that unmask society's 'generative mechanisms'—e.g., hidden capitalist logic, political propaganda, or psychological impacts of social class. For instance, the methodology scrutinizes how authors depict characters' struggles not as isolated moral failings but as symptomatic outcomes of broader systemic dysfunctions, challenging superficial understandings. It explores how texts interrogate causal mechanisms, beyond mere description.

Concurrently, analyzing satirical poetics involves examination of specific literary techniques and rhetorical functions. This includes identifying strong irony, sarcasm, parody, burlesque, and exaggeration, fundamental tools of satire [3], [4]. The analysis differentiates between satirical modes: Horatian, with its gentler, comic critique of human flaws; and Juvenalian, characterized by a darker,

hostile tone combating public figures' and institutions' wrongdoings [5]. Menippean satire, targeting specific mindsets, is also considered [5]. The study assesses how these techniques expose, ridicule, and provoke thought regarding human vices, follies, and systemic abuses, aiming for constructive social criticism and reform [3].

The central analytical strategy demonstrates the synthesis of critical realism and satirical poetics via a two-tiered approach. First, research identifies instances where satirical techniques are informed by a critical realist worldview. For example, how does critical realist insight into systemic power corruption manifest through Juvenalian satire targeting political figures or bureaucratic structures? Second, the methodology examines how specific satirical devices reveal or underscore critical realist insights. Parody, for instance, might expose ideological underpinnings of discourse, unmasking a deeper causal layer of reality. Analysis traces how satire's wit and ridicule dissect deep-seated mechanisms of power, ideology, and human behavior, moving beyond superficial lampooning to profound engagement with systemic issues. This convergence allows for an intellectually rigorous and rhetorically compelling critique, exploring how individual follies are symptomatic of deeper, systemic dysfunctions.

Primary data comprises canonical and representative 20th-century English literature. Key case studies include George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, Evelyn Waugh's *Scoop* and *A Handful of Dust*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. These authors were chosen for their prominent engagement with socio-political and cultural transformations, potent satirical techniques, and discernible critical realist perspectives. While central, the methodology references other relevant texts for broader contextualization and to demonstrate the pervasive nature of this critical mode. The selection aims for balanced representation of satirical approaches and critical realist concerns within the period.

The analytical process involves close reading, focusing on narrative structure, characterization, thematic development, rhetorical devices, and authorial philosophical stance. Specific passages illustrate how critical realist principles embed within satirical narratives and how satirical techniques articulate a critical realist understanding of society. Acknowledging the interpretive nature of literary analysis, the research strives for transparency in its analytical framework, ensuring interpretations are rigorously supported by textual evidence.

A limitation is its specific focus on 20th-century English literature; while providing a rich corpus, findings may not be directly generalizable to other traditions or periods without further investigation. Furthermore, chosen case studies, though representative, do not exhaust the full spectrum of critical realist satire. However, concentrating on these exemplary works allows for a deeply penetrating examination of the phenomenon, offering insights into the enduring power and legacy of critical realist satire.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the synthesis of critical realism and satirical poetics in 20th-century English literature forged a uniquely potent mode of critique. By grounding incisive satirical techniques in a critical realist understanding of society's hidden structures and causal mechanisms, authors like Orwell, Waugh, and Huxley transcended mere surface-level lampooning. Their works meticulously unmasked deep-seated power dynamics and ideological forces, offering an intellectually rigorous and rhetorically compelling examination of the English condition. This convergence not only provided

profound insights into systemic dysfunctions but also ensured an enduring legacy, challenging readers to critically engage with the fundamental nature of their societies even today.

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